Press Release

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Digitising our cultural heritage: US innovation system buys expertise and internet technologies from Austria

US innovation system uses AIT Austrian Institute of Technology's internationally recognised expertise in internet technologies.

Vienna (AIT): In collaboration with leading international universities, AIT experts are using their longstanding expertise in internet technologies to significantly enhance access to and use of invaluable online historical resources. The work is being funded by the US-based Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as part of the "Pelagios" project.

The new online tools make digitised cultural heritage, such as centuries-old maps and manuscripts, more easily discoverable for everyone; and at the same time enable scholars to work more productively in the digitization and publication of new materials online. Digital methods are used to identify places referenced in historical sources, including from Greek, Latin, and Arabic texts, medieval *mappae mundi* and portolan nautical charts, and maps from ancient China. By cross referencing the places digitally, it becomes possible for the first time to compare in detail the content of maps and texts side by side. Thus scholars will be able to determine, for example, how place names, geography and language have developed over time, how and when new place names were first introduced, and how geographical understanding has formed over time in different knowledge traditions.

AIT's innovative data processing, annotation and visualisation technologies are enabling Pelagios partners to work with and gather evidence from historical sources more efficiently; to conduct search and analysis on the resulting huge data in real time; and to explore the complex relations that exist within it interactively.

Tools developed as part of the Pelagios project are already being used by institutions and experts from 13 countries in 8 different languages. The new project phase will further develop Pelagios's community as well as technology over the next two years. The US-based Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has supported Pelagios with two grants totalling US$1,264,000.

Austrian expertise for online search engine with collective intelligence

AIT's "Digital Insight" research team has acquired an international reputation for managing large and complex data sets. The team led by Dr. Ross King is working on solutions for providing open, easy and intuitive access to large databases consisting of image, audio, video and text files. The digital technologies developed by AIT feature extremely easy to use interfaces and allow large and complex data to be processed using special techniques. When combined with specialist expertise in the field of historical data, AIT's technologies help advance the work of experts operating in archives, libraries and research institutions around the world.

About the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation and endeavors to strengthen, promote, and, where necessary, defend the contributions of the humanities and the arts to human flourishing and to the well-being of diverse and democratic societies. To this end, it supports exemplary institutions of higher education and culture as they renew and provide access to an invaluable heritage of ambitious, path-breaking work. The Foundation makes grants in five core program areas: Higher Education and Scholarship in the Humanities; Arts and Cultural Heritage; Diversity; Scholarly Communications; and International Higher Education and Strategic Projects. For further information see http://www.mellon.org/.

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